

MILITARISING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:

A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF ALGORITHMIC WARFARE

**PEACE &
SECURITY**

CFFP THE CENTRE FOR
FEMINIST
FOREIGN POLICY



Legal Notice

Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy CFFP gGmbH
Langenscheidtstraße 12B, 10827 Berlin
Registration Court Charlottenburg, HRB 196999 B

Managing Directors:
Nina Bernarding and Kristina Lunz

Author:
Anna Provan

This report was produced as part of the “Confronting Obstacles to Peace: Towards a New Feminist World Order” project, which is funded by the Robert Bosch Foundation. The views expressed in this report reflect those of CFFP and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Robert Bosch Foundation.

Suggested Citation: CFFP (2025) Militarising Artificial Intelligence: A Feminist Analysis of Algorithmic Warfare.

Please contact CFFP for permission to reproduce any part of the content of this report.

Email: hello@centreforffp.org

CONTENTS

1. Introduction	4
The Promise of Military Artificial Intelligence	4
Briefing Purpose & Structure	4
Text Box: Defining Artificial Intelligence	5
Military Applications of Artificial Intelligence	6
2. A War Lab for the Future: Military AI in Gaza	8
Text Box: Israel's Use of AI DSS in Gaza	10
Keeping a Human in the Loop vs. Meaningful Human Control	11
The Removal of Moral Responsibility	13
Implications Under International Law	14
3. Military AI and Gender-Based Violence (GBV)	16
4. International Governance & Ways Forward	18
Text Box: Timeline of Regulatory Efforts	19
5. Recommendations	22
6. Conclusion	25

INTRODUCTION

I. The Promise of Military Artificial Intelligence

According to proponents of military artificial intelligence (AI), its promise is one of precision, accuracy, and pace. Often celebrated for its unprecedented potential to “revolutionise the battlefield” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2020), military AI is credited with increasing situational awareness, enhancing decision-making capabilities, and enabling ‘machine-speed’ threat responses in war (UK Ministry of Defence, 2022). Importantly, certain applications of military AI have even been depicted as tools capable of reducing civilian casualties in conflict settings (Utrecht University, 2025). Advocates have argued that their ‘objectivity’ allows for more rational, less emotional decision-making, and stricter adherence to international humanitarian law. However, mounting evidence from contemporary conflicts involving AI-driven systems suggests that such theories are increasingly detached from reality. Rather than mitigating civilian harm, the deployment of artificial intelligence has been correlated with increased casualties and insecure conditions for civilian populations (particularly when used in combination with weapons that can be indiscriminate in impact such as unguided munitions). As the use of artificial intelligence in war continues to outpace its regulation, profound ethical, legal, and humanitarian concerns remain unaddressed. Feminist and human-centred solutions are urgently needed to forge pathways towards more inclusive, accountable, and responsible governance frameworks, and to counter the risks associated with new technologies employed in violent conflict.

II. Briefing Purpose & Structure

This policy briefing presents a feminist analysis of military artificial intelligence. It moves beyond euphemistic framings of ‘strategic technological advancements’ to critically examine the practical, ethical, and legal risks associated with the deployment of AI in warfare – as well as the related gendered and humanitarian concerns. In order to demonstrate that the threats posed by military AI are neither hypothetical nor remote, this briefing grounds its analysis in the concrete case study of Israel’s ongoing war in Gaza. Israel’s use of military AI in Gaza – particularly AI-enabled decision support systems – is arguably the most controversial and extensively documented instance to date. The unprecedented scale and speed of Israel’s military campaign in Gaza and the resulting civilian casualties make it a pivotal case for understanding the harms associated with military AI and the ways in which algorithmic warfare can render innocent lives expendable.

In summary, the following briefing will:

- 1.** Provide an overview of the ways in which the Israeli military deploys AI in Gaza and the related practical, ethical, and legal concerns;
- 2.** Analyse the role that gender plays in exacerbating the civilian harm caused by AI-driven systems in war;
- 3.** Examine existing regulatory approaches to and international cooperation on governance for military AI; and
- 4.** Offer feminist and human-centred recommendations to support the development of more inclusive, accountable, and responsible governance frameworks.

TEXT BOX

DEFINING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The term artificial intelligence is defined differently by different actors. According to the United States' Political Declaration on Responsible Military Use of Artificial Intelligence and Autonomy (2023), AI refers to "the ability of machines to perform tasks that would otherwise require human intelligence". These tasks could include recognising patterns, learning from experience, drawing conclusions, making predictions, or generating recommendations (ibid). In other words, as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute has summarised, artificial intelligence encompasses "the set of all processes that mimic human capacities" (SIPRI, 2025).

III. Military Applications of Artificial Intelligence

Over the last ten years, the international debate on artificial intelligence in the military domain has focused primarily on the issue of autonomy in weapons systems. (Lethal) autonomous weapons systems (LAWS) - that is, weapons systems, which, once activated, select and apply force to targets without human intervention (ICRC, 2025) - raise urgent legal and ethical questions. These questions have incentivised extensive academic and policy focussed discussions, as well as regulatory efforts at the multilateral level - including within the UN Group of Governmental Experts on LAWS (GGE) under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). This debate is undoubtedly important and warranted. However, there is growing concern that the dominant focus on LAWS has detracted attention from the plurality of additional AI-based technologies in the military domain, which may be more influential and more widely deployed (Nadibaidze et al., 2024). As experts have noted, military AI is not a monolithic category (Rosen, 2024). It encompasses a wide range of use cases and applications, which continue to increase in scope and magnitude (Mohan, 2023). In addition to autonomy in weapons systems, AI has been integrated into command and control, information management, and logistics and training (UNIDIR, 2023).

This briefing will pay particular attention to AI-based Decision Support Systems (AI DSS), technologies that are increasingly developed and deployed to inform decision-making related to targeting and the use of force (Nadibaidze et al., 2024). AI DSS are computerised tools that analyse substantial amounts of data in order to provide analyses, recommendations, and predictions (Zhou & Griepel, 2024). They are designed to support humans in making complex decisions in conflict settings by providing, among other things, recommendations on “who or what to attack and where” as well as “when and how” (ibid). AI DSS is often characterised as a “key enabling technology for faster and enhanced decision-making cycles” (ibid) because it dramatically shortens the time between the identification of a target and any action taken against it (ICRC, 2024). While these technologies do not take decisions independently, they are capable of exerting significant influence on decisions regarding the use of force (Hinds, 2024).

2. A WAR LAB FOR THE FUTURE: MILITARY AI IN GAZA

Far from a distant or hypothetical concern, artificial intelligence is already being deployed by militaries around the world, with devastating consequences for civilian populations in conflict settings. For example, ever since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the country has become a 'testbed' for AI warfare (Nadibaidze et al, 2024). As the conflict has progressed, artificial intelligence has been used to monitor military manoeuvres, intercept and translate communications, and make decisions (SIPRI, 2025). While artificial intelligence is not involved in every task, observers have noted a scale of use that is "noticeably different from previous armed conflicts" (Nadibaidze et al., 2024). Most troublingly, with the advent of increasingly autonomous weapons systems such as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs, commonly known as drones) on the battlefield, Ukraine has gained a reputation among private sector actors as a "war lab for the future" (Modern War Institute, 2025). This has prompted a significant mobilisation among (mostly US) weapons manufacturers to trial new technologies on the ground with the goal of obtaining the increasingly coveted 'battle-tested in Ukraine' credentials (The Kyiv Independent, 2024). In contrast to the extensive reporting on drones however, little in-depth

information is publicly available about the use of AI DSS in the Russia-Ukraine war (Nadibaidze et al., 2024). Arguably, the most widespread and most controversial use of AI DSS by a military in a conflict setting has been documented in Gaza.

According to research conducted by Action on Armed Violence, civilian casualties from explosive weapons around the world rose by 67% in 2024 (AOAV, 2025). Israel was identified as the single largest perpetrator of civilian harm from explosive violence worldwide, accounting for 55% of all civilian casualties (ibid). As the research has shown, nearly 34,000 deaths and injuries across Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria in 2024 can be attributed to the actions of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) (ibid). By the time of writing, the official death toll in Gaza had surpassed 55,500 (The Guardian, 2025). However, this is widely considered to be a conservative estimate, with some studies suggesting that the actual figure could be as high as 180,000 (The Lancet, 2024).

Many experts have warned that the unprecedented civilian casualty rate of Israel's war in Gaza can be explained, in part, by the Israeli military's increasing reliance on AI-powered targeting (Ro-

sen, 2023). Israel's use of AI in warfare is not necessarily new. As observers have noted, the Gaza Strip has long served as a 'testing ground' for new weaponry and technology developed by the country's defence industry (Access Now, 2024; Lowenstein, 2023). In 2021, the IDF characterised Israel's 11-day war with Hamas as "the first artificial intelligence war" (ibid), as the deployment of AI-powered tools led to exponential increases in the pace of target generation. As the former Chief of the General Staff of the IDF explained, "once [the] machine was activated", Israel was able to generate 100 targets a day, a number which would have been largely unthinkable before the technology was introduced, when the IDF would generate no more than 50 targets in one year (The Guardian, 2024).

In 2023, the pace of the IDF's operations only continued to increase as AI generated "a larger set of targets than ever before" (Rosen, 2023). Senior Israeli military officials spoke of "around the clock" airstrikes (The Guardian, 2024) after AI had been used to identify more than 37,000 suspected militants in the first month of fighting. By December 2023, Israel had attacked over 25,000 of them (Rosen, 2023).

TEXT BOX

ISRAEL'S USE OF AI DSS IN GAZA

The IDF has reportedly used at least three AI DSS in its current military operation in Gaza. These systems aggregate and analyse surveillance intelligence information for a variety of purposes related to targeting and the use of force:

1. THE GOSPEL

The Gospel generates lists of **buildings** or other **structural targets** to be attacked (SIPRI, 2025; Human Rights Watch, 2024). These structural targets are generally organised into one of four categories: (1) **Tactical Targets**, which include armed militant cells, weapons warehouses, and militant headquarters; (2) **Underground Targets**, which include the tunnels used by Hamas and the Islamic Jihad; (3) **Family Homes** of Hamas and Islamic Jihad operatives and; (4) **Power Targets**, which are residential and high-rise buildings largely inhabited by civilians (Vox, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2024).

2. LAVENDER

Lavender produces lists of **individuals** to be attacked. The system assigns a numerical rating to an individual, indicating the perceived likelihood of their affiliation with armed Palestinian groups (Human Rights Watch, 2024). According to Human Rights Watch, "this process relies to a large degree on unsubstantiated guesswork" and is generally related to an individual's social connections or associations (ibid).

3. WHERE'S DADDY?

Where's Daddy? uses geolocation tracking to **trace the movements of individuals marked as military targets**. Once the individual enters a specific location (usually their family home), the IDF receives an alert to instigate an attack, during which the target is often killed alongside their family members and the other inhabitants of the residential building (ibid).

Israel's use of AI-powered systems in Gaza has raised significant concerns among the international community and has received substantial scrutiny and condemnation from legal experts and human rights advocates. While Israel has asserted that such systems actually enhance the accuracy of targeting processes, thereby reducing civilian casualties (Utrecht University, 2025), overwhelming evidence to the contrary points us towards a different conclusion. Instead, it appears that, as the pace of war increases, precautionary principles in keeping with international law are more likely to be abandoned and harm to innocent civilians is likely to increase (Bo & Dorsey, 2024). In the sections that follow, we will undertake a more in-depth analysis of the practical, ethical, and legal concerns that arise when a state outsources its military decision-making to artificial intelligence and the implications for civilians in war.

I. Keeping a Human in the Loop vs. Meaningful Human Judgement and Control

At this point, the dangers associated with the deployment of AI in conflict settings are relatively well-known. Indeed, recognition of the associated risks has led to widespread agreement on the need for human oversight in AI decision-making pipelines in order to safeguard human rights and maintain control. This is often referred to as “keeping a human in the loop”, a phrase commonly used to emphasise the importance of human interaction, intervention, and judgment in the context of automated decision-making (Harvard Data Science Review, 2023). In contrast to fully autonomous weapons systems, AI DSS appear to satisfy the conditions of the human in the loop approach as they incorporate both automation and human decision-making. AI DSS are designed to support and inform a human analyst’s assessments – not replace them entirely (ibid). They therefore require that humans and machines work in tandem during the targeting process. For some, this fact makes AI DSS ‘ideal’ systems for the battlefield as they are able to “leverage the precision and reliability of automation without sacrificing the robustness and flexibility of human intelligence” (Scharre, 2016). However, others challenge the proposition that the human in the loop approach is sufficient to mitigate the risks posed by AI DSS. After all, there are many factors that undermine human judgement and the thoughtful consideration of algorithmic recommendations in conflict settings (ibid).

First, is the ‘black box’ nature of AI’s decision-making. As Arthur Holland Michel explains, “in computing, a ‘black box’ is a system for which we know the inputs and outputs but can’t see the process by which it turns the former into the latter” (Michel, 2020). In our discussion of military AI, the black box problem refers to the opacity of an AI system’s inner workings. While we may understand how the system was programmed, we can rarely achieve a complete understanding of why the system behaves as it does and how exactly it reaches its conclusions (Wilson, 2025). This lack of intelligibility in AI decision-making raises significant concerns regarding accuracy, accountability, and the ability to identify errors and biases. When it comes to targeting in particular, a human analyst’s lack of understanding of the reasoning behind an algorithm’s recommendation can substantially impede their ability to verify the legitimacy of the suggested target, thus complicating efforts to abide by international humanitarian law (Klownowska, 2025).

Second, is the speed and complexity of contemporary military operations powered by AI. AI DSS generate targets at an unprecedented rate, and real-time, location-based recommendations require analysts to act swiftly in order to strike before a target moves or disappears from view (ibid). As Kolowska explains, “the speed and volume of target recommendations [generated by AI DSS] introduce a climate of risk where recommendations are not to be ignored. As algorithmic suggestions continue to appear on the screens with high frequency, they create a sense of urgency [that] may...prompt hasty decisions” (ibid). Indeed, research has demonstrated that “in high pressure environments characterised by... cognitive complexity, pressure, stress, and time constraints, humans are more likely to defer to the judgment of machines” – even “when presented with contradictory information” (Bo & Dorsey, 2024). This phenomenon is often referred to as ‘autonomation bias’ (ibid).

In short, while proponents of AI DSS insist that humans remain the ultimate decision-makers when it comes to the use of force (by, for example, selecting, authorising, and vetoing targets suggested by the system) (Nadibaidze et al., 2024), a growing body of research points to a reduced capacity for meaningful judgement and critical evaluation by human analysts in conflict settings. In other words, although humans are theoretically involved in the targeting cycle, it is possible that their review becomes merely symbolic or perfunctory. Rather than restraining the power of AI, humans may function as

“rubber stamps” of approval (ibid), authorising decisions grounded in data that is “likely biased...incomplete... and technically impossible to scrutinise” (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

At this point, it is important to emphasise the fact that the concerns outlined above are far from speculative. Indeed, testimonies from members of the IDF have only confirmed apprehensions about the erosion of human control over the use of force in Gaza. Speaking to journalists from two Israeli news outlets, +972 and Local Call, Israeli soldiers shared that during the early stages of the current war, officers were given “sweeping approval” to adopt the kill lists generated by Lavender, with “no requirement to... check why the machine made those choices or to examine the raw intelligence data on which they were based” (+972, 2024). Furthermore, these sources have confirmed that the human review process involved was essentially performative, as they themselves would devote no more than “20 seconds” to the verification of a target before authorising a strike (ibid). This distinct lack of care and attention paid to target verification becomes even more concerning when considering the fact that the soldiers were aware that the system generates illegitimate targets in at least 10% of cases and has also been known to suggest targets with only tenuous connections to armed groups in Gaza – or even none at all (ibid). In the testimonies gathered, soldiers generally referred to the civilian casualties that resulted from this margin of error as “collateral damage” (ibid).

II. The Removal of Moral Responsibility

The idea of ‘permissible collateral damage’ is one that has been embedded in the official policy of the IDF since the beginning of the current war in Gaza. According to the same investigative report, IDF officials imposed “pre-authorized limits” on the number of civilians that could be killed during a strike on a single Hamas militant (The Guardian, 2024). This is a ratio that has changed over time and has varied according to the seniority of the target (ibid). For low-ranking Hamas militants in Gaza, the IDF deemed it ‘acceptable’ to kill up to 15 civilians in one strike. For top-ranking officials, this number increased to as many as 100 (ibid).

From an ethical perspective, it could be natural to wonder how members of the IDF were able to knowingly authorize operations which would result in the deaths of so many innocent civilians. Some experts have suggested that it could be explained, in part, by the psychological distance AI establishes between a commander and the human consequences of their decisions (Schwarz, 2018; Johnson, 2023). Indeed, researchers have cautioned that the deployment of AI in conflict settings can obscure a soldier’s sense of responsibility for killing on the battlefield (ibid). The concern is that a continued reliance on automated decision-making may cause soldiers to become “overconfident, injudicious, and progressively desensitized” to the enactment of violence and, subsequently, to the prospect of civilian harm (Johnson, 2023). Far

removed from the realities on the ground, soldiers who enact violence from a distance may be prevented from “developing fundamental military ethical virtues such as mercy, compassion, respect, and empathy – a moral void [that] machines cannot fill” (ibid). As Elke Schwarz (2018) has argued, AI systems offer an “illusory promise of certainty [and] the fallacy of being able to offer a technical way of resolving ethical questions”. They can therefore provide soldiers with an opportunity to ‘outsource’ or ‘offset’ moral responsibility for their actions (Johnson, 2023), leading to a reduced sense of responsibility and ownership over their decisions.

III. Implications Under International Law

While there may be disagreement about the extent of ‘permissible collateral damage’ from an ethical or even strategic perspective, international law is far more explicit when it comes to the targeting of civilians in conflict settings. As the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) explains, “targeting is regulated by international humanitarian law and more specifically by the rules governing the conduct of hostilities, which define and limit who or what can be targeted, and under what conditions”. For an attack to be lawful, three cardinal rules must be followed:

1. DISTINCTION → The principle of distinction is often described as the “cornerstone of international humanitarian law” (ICRC, n.d). In international armed conflicts (defined as a conflict between two or more states), the rule of distinction requires that state parties always distinguish between combatants and civilians – and that they only target combatants.

In non-international armed conflicts (defined as a conflict between a state and non-state armed actor(s)), the principle requires that parties always distinguish between members of an organised armed group, individuals who are directly participating in the conflict, and civilians who are not – and that they only target individuals directly participating in hostilities.

Similarly, the principle of distinction requires that parties to an armed conflict always distinguish between military objectives and civilian objects and infrastructure – and that they only target military objectives. Crucially, as the ICRC explains, in case of any doubt regarding the classification of an individual or an object, the individual or object must be presumed to be civilian in nature and thus protected from attack (ibid).

2. PROPORTIONALITY → Even when a target is considered to be legitimate under the principle of distinction, attacks are further regulated by the principle of proportionality. The principle of proportionality prohibits attacks which are “expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated” (ICRC, n.d).

While experts admit that applying proportionality in practice largely relies on the subjective assessment of the commander, it generally demands thoughtful consideration of the balance between direct military advantage and civilian harm. The principle is intended to act as a compromise between the underlying principles of [humanity](#) and [military necessity](#) – with the ultimate objective of limiting excessive violence against civilians (ibid).

3. PRECAUTIONS → Once the requirements under the rules of distinction and proportionality have been fulfilled, the attacking party is also required to take all feasible precautions to avoid, or at least minimise, the loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, and damage to civilian objects (ICRC, n.d).

Importantly, while humans using AI DSS may feel a sense of distance between themselves and the consequences of their actions, they remain “legally accountable and responsible for the ways in which they make decisions, whether these processes involve AI DSS or not” (Nadibaidze et al., 2024). The principles and rules underpinning international humanitarian law are “fundamentally human-centric” (ibid). They therefore “require holding human agents, not AI systems, accountable for any violations” (ibid). With everything we know about the IDF’s use of AI DSS in Gaza, it can be “very difficult to see how military personnel... are presently complying with their legal obligations, or whether under these circumstances legal compliance is possible at all” (Bo & Dorsey, 2024).

3. MILITARY AI AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

Feminist scholars and advocates have long argued that gendered norms and patriarchal power structures impact the ways in which we “view, use, and engage with weapons, war, and violence” (Stop Killer Robots, 2020). Essentialist notions of gender are pervasive within our societies and generally work to draw distinctions between different categories of people, behaviours, and activities based on symbolic ideals of masculinity and femininity (Cohen, 2013; CFFP, 2022). In contrast to what is often depicted as ‘passive femininity’, masculinity has enjoyed a long-standing association with strength, rationality, dominance, and aggression (Sjoberg, 2010). Far from being natural or inherent, this form of masculinity is something that must be performed, produced, and continually reinforced (Butler, 1990) – often legitimised through a demonstrated capacity and/or willingness to enact violence. While analysing the associations between gender, weapons, and war may appear to be an academic or theoretical exercise, it provides valuable insights into the ways in which weapons are used, against whom, and for what purposes (WILPF, 2016). In our discussion of military AI, these associations can help us understand how gendered biases are embedded in new technologies of violence and how they exacerbate gender-based violence and civilian harm.

Scholars of gender and technology have long argued that gender relations are “materialised in technology” (Wajcman, 2010). In other words, although technology is often portrayed as ‘neut-

ral’, ‘objective’, and devoid of social subjectivity, it is inherently and irrefutably gendered. As Judy Wajcman explains, when new technologies are developed, they are imbued with the “knowledge, beliefs, desires, and practices” of “the societies that invent and use them” (ibid). Gendered norms, biases, and prejudices can be introduced into machine learning – either implicitly or explicitly – at multiple points throughout a system’s life cycle – including during data collection or the training of algorithmic models (UNIDIR, 2021). Social harms can be exacerbated as the programme begins to make connections between gender and other identity markers, such as race, age, sexual orientation, and ability (ibid). Indeed, research has found that these systems do not merely reflect human biases but actively amplify them (WIRED, 2025). Thus, as feminist observers have noted, when technology is developed and applied within a societal context that celebrates, affirms, and reproduces essentialist notions of militarised masculinity, it is inevitable that it will come to reflect the values, knowledge systems, language, and interpretative lens of that framework (Acheson, 2022).

So, what does this mean for military applications of artificial intelligence? And what is the connection between algorithmic (gender) bias and civilian harm in conflict settings? Militarised masculinity is a form of gender essentialism that makes male bodies expendable (WILPF, 2025). By characterising men as inherently violent, threatening, and predatory, militarised masculinities can reduce

what should be complex considerations based on the principle of distinction in wartime to a dichotomous choice rooted in gender stereotypes. Indeed, militaries have been known to use gender-based considerations in their construction of 'target profiles'. A target profile can be described as "a pattern of sensor data that is taken to represent a target" (Article 36, 2019). Once constructed, target profiles act as classification tools (ibid) – drawing distinctions between individuals categorised as either civilians or combatants, threats or non-threats, killable bodies or non-killable bodies (Acheson, 2022). As human rights organisations have cautioned, this process is one of digital dehumanisation. It is one that works to reduce human beings, in all of their complexity, to data points, categorising individuals not as "people" – but "as [mere] producers or possessors of certain sensor-identifiable characteristics" (Article 36, 2019).

When based on collective identity markers like gender, target profiles raise significant ethical concerns. As Article 36 has explained, "given that [the] 'combatant' identity is mutable, it is hard to see how any markers relating to that identity would be reliably valid or wouldn't present very severe risks of false positives" (ibid). This conclusion may appear to be self-evident, but research has shown that some militaries are already accepting identity markers as sufficient indicators of an individual's participation in war – and have been for some time. Indeed, this is a finding that emer-

ged as early as 2012, in relation to the US government's 'signature [drone] strikes' in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and Libya. During these strikes, the US army used gender as a determining factor when deciding whether or not an individual could be considered a legitimate target. According to sources within the Obama administration, the government's methodology counted "all military-age males in a strike zone as combatants... unless there [was] explicit intelligence posthumously proving them innocent" (New York Times, 2012). The "all military-age males" approach is something that has also been documented in Gaza. According to testimonies from members of the IDF, the 20-second target verification process only required analysts to carry out one check before authorising a strike: ensuring that the suggested target was male and not female (+972, 2024).

As feminist civil society has argued, turning the assumption that all cisgender men are inherently violent and therefore undeserving of civilian status into official policy is an act of gender-based violence (Acheson, 2022). In the urgent and immediate context, this policy dramatically increases the risk of civilian harm in conflict settings. In the broader context, it risks further entrenching and concretising harmful gender essentialisms, posing serious challenges to the achievement of gender equality and gender justice (ibid).

4. INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE & WAYS FORWARD

***“If AI speeds up killing in war, decision-makers must slow it down”
(Rosen, 2023).***

The integration of AI DSS into military operations has led to dramatic changes in the character of warfare. It has allowed for a pace and scale of fighting that has never been seen before, resulting in unprecedented levels of violence and civilian harm. Yet, despite the growing awareness of the risks these technologies pose, AI DSS remain “largely unregulated and under-scrutinised” (T.M.C. Asser Instituut, 2025). While regulatory efforts are steadily growing, they are largely fragmented and “scattered across various initiatives”, a fact that has hindered meaningful progress on the issue (Dorsey et al., 2025).

TEXT BOX

TIMELINE OF REGULATORY EFFORTS

2023

→ In February 2023, the Government of the Netherlands hosted the first **Global Summit on Responsible Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain (REAIM 2023)**. The summit, co-hosted by the Republic of Korea, provided an important opportunity for stakeholders to discuss the opportunities, challenges, and risks presented by military AI. It concluded with the publication of a **Call to Action** outlining the responsible development, deployment, and use of AI in the military domain. The call was endorsed by 57 countries and territories.

→ In parallel with the launch of the REAIM initiative, the United States released the **Political Declaration on Responsible Military Use of Artificial Intelligence and Autonomy**. Endorsed by over 50 states, the declaration has provided a framework for a number of state-led working groups in this area (UNIDIR, 2025).

2024

→ In September 2024, the Republic of Korea, the Netherlands, Singapore, Kenya, and the United Kingdom hosted the second **Global Summit on Responsible Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain (REAIM 2024)**. The summit concluded with the publication of a **Blueprint for Action** that built on the previous year's call to action by outlining more concrete measures such as risk assessments, human oversight, and prevention of the proliferation of AI in weapons of mass destruction. The blueprint was endorsed by 60 countries and territories.

→ In December 2024, the UN General Assembly adopted **Resolution 79/239 'Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain and its Implications for International Peace and Security'**. The resolution constitutes the first comprehensive UN initiative addressing the military applications of artificial intelligence and their potential impact on global peace and security.

2025

→ In February 2025, France and India hosted the **Paris AI Action Summit**. The summit resulted in the publication of the **Paris Declaration on Maintaining Human Control in AI enabled Weapons Systems**. The declaration emphasises the imperative to preserve meaningful human oversight over the use of force in military operations involving artificial intelligence. It has been endorsed by 27 countries.

As a group of leading legal scholars cautioned in their submission to the UN Secretary-General under UNGA Resolution 79/239, “unlike [L]AWS, which have been debated in the framework of the CCW for the past decade, AI DSS lack a comparable institutional platform” (ibid). As a result, existing efforts to regulate them have failed to “provide the regulatory focus or coordination needed” to address the profound challenges AI DSS create for human judgement and international humanitarian law (ibid). Most importantly, the authors argue that without this dedicated regulatory focus, a “growing reliance on AI DSS risks outpacing ethical and legal safeguards” (ibid). Given what is at stake, it is a risk that demands urgent attention.

Although a handful of states have insisted that international humanitarian law is sufficient to regulate military applications of AI (Rosen, 2024), experts have argued that turning to IHL as the only framework to regulate defence-related applications of AI would be a “category mistake” (ibid). There are a multitude of factors related to AI DSS that can make the law difficult to interpret and apply (ibid). As Brianna Rosen has argued, this is where “policy guidance, political declarations, rules of engagement and codes of conduct” can fill the gaps and where non-legally binding policies can “build consensus on international norms surrounding the development and deployment of military AI” (ibid). The future of military AI governance hinges on cooperation over competition and the political will to prioritise the dignity and well-being of people over strategic and technological advances.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS:

As feminists, we categorically oppose the use of militarised technologies which reduce human lives, in all of their complexity, to numerical ratings and sensor-identifiable characteristics. Ultimately, we call on states to refrain from using artificial intelligence in the military domain, particularly in decision-making or actions related to the use of force.

At the same time, we recognise the profound challenges associated with advocating for disarmament in the current geopolitical context and maintain no illusions about the time and effort that will be required to achieve this goal. Given the urgent need to mitigate the civilian harm caused by military applications of artificial intelligence in conflict settings, we offer the following (short-term) recommendations. These recommendations are intended to support the development of more inclusive, accountable, and responsible governance frameworks rooted in respect for people and the environment:

1. STRENGTHEN POLICY FRAMEWORKS BEYOND LEGAL INSTRUMENTS

While international humanitarian law provides an important foundational framework for the regulation of AI DSS, it is not sufficient to mitigate the risks posed by AI DSS alone. States should prioritise the development of robust policy guidance, political declarations, and codes of conduct to complement existing legal structures (Rosen, 2024).

2. PRIORITISE COOPERATION FOR GOVERNANCE

To foster trust and build confidence, the international community must prioritise cooperation over competition in the governance of military AI. Experts have recommended that states utilise platforms such as the UN General Assembly's First Committee on Disarmament and International Security and the Global Commission on the Responsible Use of AI in the Military Domain to support inclusive and mutually reinforcing dialogues on the risks associated with AI DSS (Dorsey et al., 2025).

3. ENCOURAGE MULTI-STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The international community must involve representatives of (feminist) civil society, academia, industry, and international organisations in regulatory design and review. They must also include "scholars of gender, race and ability... as a way to ensure that policies regarding the military applications of AI are informed by diverse perspectives" (UNIDIR, 2021).

4. PROHIBIT THE USE OF ACTIVE CONFLICT ZONES AS "TESTING GROUNDS" FOR MILITARY AI

Governance frameworks must explicitly ban the testing of experimental military AI in active conflict zones. They must limit the power of the arms industry in order to ensure that, "the development, deployment and use of [these technologies is not] left to the whims of markets alone" (United Nations, 2024).

5. ENSURE MEANINGFUL HUMAN JUDGEMENT AND CONTROL

It is essential that AI DSS "remain means that help and support, rather than hinder or displace, humans in military decision-making" (Zhou & Griepel, 2024). Humans must retain meaningful control over any decisions that threaten the lives and dignity of individuals in conflict settings, in order to reduce humanitarian risks, mitigate ethical concerns, and ensure compliance with international humanitarian law (ibid). As experts have noted, this will likely lead to restrictions on the design and use of AI and machine learning systems (ICRC, 2021).

6. MITIGATE BIAS TO PREVENT DISCRIMINATORY OUTCOMES

AI DSS developers and users should take measures to mitigate gender, racial, ethnic, disability and other similar forms of bias in their system's design and use, including data collection and training (ICRC, 2025). They should also incorporate specific gender-based reviews of their systems to show how the system represents and responds to gender and how harmful effects have been mitigated (UNIDIR, 2021). Military applications of AI that have the potential to perpetuate or exacerbate gender-based harms should be subject to moratoriums or banned completely (ibid).

7. CONDUCT AFTER-ACTION REVIEWS

Armed forces should conduct timely and objective after-action reviews of AI DSS use cases in order to examine "the reliability of the outputs of AI DSS in context and how users interacted with and responded to the AI DSS generated outputs and prompts" (ICRC, 2025). These reviews should assess whether the AI DSS functioned as intended, the impact its use had on civilians, and the user's ability to comply with IHL (ibid). As the International Committee of the Red Cross has emphasised, "a process should be in place to suspend or discontinue the use of AI DSS when issues affecting reliability, compliance, or safety are identified". The system must then be modified, re-tested, and reviewed before it is deployed again (ibid).

8. RESTRICT USE CASES

As the International Committee of the Red Cross has argued, "before determining how an AI-DSS should be used for military purposes, users should first assess whether such a tool should be used at all" (ICRC, 2025). This assessment requires an analysis of the system's suitability for the specific task and context, "ensuring that it has clear, well-defined goals and access to high quality data" (ibid). In some cases (such as nuclear-weapon command and control), any use of AI DSS must be completely ruled out (ibid).

9. UTILISE AI DSS TO ENHANCE THE PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS

The international community must consider ways in which artificial intelligence can be integrated into operations in order to mitigate, and not exacerbate, civilian harm (Rosen, 2023). As Rosen has argued, rather than focusing on increasing the pace of military operations, policymakers should "leverage the speed at which AI systems operate to introduce tactical pauses, more carefully review targets, ensure other precautionary measures are prioritised... and consider alternative options" (ibid).

10. ARTICULATE A VISION FOR JUSTICE FOR SURVIVORS THROUGH THE LENS OF VICTIM ASSISTANCE AND REMEDIATION

The international community should consider the inclusion of positive obligations in regulatory frameworks for military artificial intelligence to address the harms inflicted on people, communities, and the environment (International Disarmament Institute, 2025). To date, discussions on governance (including those concerning a potential treaty on lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS)) have largely neglected provisions for victim assistance and remediation (ibid). Justice for survivors must be placed at the centre of regulatory efforts, ensuring meaningful support, recognition, and redress for those affected by the deployment of military AI (ibid).

CONCLUSION

The integration of artificial intelligence into military decision-making related to targeting and the use of force has led to unprecedented insecurity for civilians in conflict settings. As the case of Gaza has demonstrated, the reality of AI DSS is not one of precision or objectivity – as its proponents may claim – but rather one of extraordinary violence, digital dehumanisation, and gender-based harm. The use of AI-driven systems in war poses substantial threats to the pursuit of (gender) justice, equality, human rights, and dignity. It also presents considerable challenges for adherence to international law. Cooperation is urgently needed to create robust international governance frameworks rooted in respect for people and the environment and to replace the pursuit of innovation and speed with a commitment to humanity and restraint.

REFERENCES

+972 (2024) 'Lavender': The AI machine directing Israel's bombing spree in Gaza. Available at: <https://www.972mag.com/lavender-ai-israeli-army-gaza/> [accessed: 7th April 2024]

Access Now (2024) How Israel is Automating Human Rights Abuses and War Crimes. Available at: <https://www.accessnow.org/publication/artificial-genocidal-intelligence-israel-gaza/> [accessed: 3rd April 2025]

Acheson, R. (2022) Feminist and Queer Perspectives on the Violence of Weaponised Security. Available at: <https://www.sdu.dk/en/forskning/forskningsenheder/samf/cws/cws-activities/gender-peace-security/ray-archeson> [accessed: 30th April 2025]

Action on Armed Violence (2025) Global Civilian Casualties from Explosive Weapons Surge in 2024 by 67%, Hitting Record Highs. Available at: <https://aoav.org.uk/2025/global-civilian-casualties-from-explosive-weapons-surge-in-2024-by-67-hitting-record-highs/> [accessed: 2nd April 2025]

Article 36 (2019) Target Profiles: An Initial Consideration of 'Target Profiles' as a Basis for Rule-Making in the Context of Discussions on Autonomy in Weapons Systems. Available at: <https://article36.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Target-profiles.pdf> [accessed: 23rd April 2025]

Bo, M. & J. Dorsey (2024) Symposium on Military AI and the Law of Armed Conflict: The 'Need' for Speed – The Cost of Unregulated AI Decision-Support Systems to Civilians. Available at: <https://opiniojuris.org/2024/04/04/symposium-on-military-ai-and-the-law-of-armed-conflict-the-need-for-speed-the-cost-of-unregulated-ai-decision-support-systems-to-civilians/> [accessed: 8th April 2025]

Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

CFFP (2022) *Make Foreign Policy Feminist: A Feminist Foreign Policy Manifesto for Germany*. Available at: <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/CFFP-Manifesto-EN-2022.pdf> [Accessed 16 Apr. 2025]

CNA (2022) Leveraging AI to Mitigate Civilian Harm. Available at: <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/trecms/pdf/AD1181578.pdf> [accessed: 7th April 2025]

Cohen, C.J. (2013) 'Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?' *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1(1), pp. 437–465.

Dorsey, J., Bo, M., Bode, I., & Schwarz, E. (2025) Submission to the United Nations General Assembly on the Ethical and Legal Implications of AI Decision-Support Systems in Military Contexts. Available at: <https://www.asser.nl/media/797846/unga-submission-dorsey-bo-bode-schwar.pdf> [accessed: 29th April 2025]

Harvard Data Science Review (2023) Data Science and Engineering With Humans in the Loop, Behind the Loop, and Above the Loop. Available at: <https://hdsr.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/812vijgg/release/3> [accessed: 9th April 2025]

Hinds, G. (2024) Symposium on Military AI and the Law of Armed Conflict: A (Pre)cautionary Note About Artificial Intelligence in Military Decision Making. Available at: <https://opiniojuris.org/2024/04/04/symposium-on-military-ai-and-the-law-of-armed-conflict-a-precautionary-note-about-artificial-intelligence-in-military-decision-making/> [accessed: 11th March 2025]

Human Rights Watch (2024) Questions and Answers: Israeli Military's Use of Digital Tools in Gaza. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/10/questions-and-answers-israeli-militarys-use-digital-tools-gaza> [accessed 7th April 2025]

ICRC (2025) Autonomous Weapons. Available at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/law-and-policy/autonomous-weapons> [accessed: 11th March 2025]

ICRC (2024) Decisions, Decisions, Decisions: Computation and Artificial Intelligence in Military Decision-Making. Available at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/decisions-decisions-decisions-computation-and-artificial-intelligence-military-decision> [accessed: 11th March 2025]

ICRC (2021) ICRC Position Paper: Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in Armed Conflict: A Human-Centred Approach. Available at: <https://international-review.icrc.org/articles/ai-and-machine-learning-in-armed-conflict-a-human-centred-approach-913> [accessed: 5th May 2025]

ICRC (2025) Submission to the United Nations Secretary-General on Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain. Available at: https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/ICRC_Report_Submission_to_UNSG_on_AI_in_military_domain.pdf [accessed: 5th May 2025]

ICRC (n.d.) Targeting Under International Humanitarian law. How Does Law Protect in War? Online Casebook. Available at: <https://casebook.icrc.org/highlight/targeting-under-international-humanitarian-law> [Accessed: 15 April 2025]

International Disarmament Institute (2025) Considerations for a Victim Assistance Provision in a Treaty Banning Killer Robots: Submission Draft. Pace University. Available at: <https://bpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/blogs.pace.edu/dist/0/195/files/2025/05/Considerations-for-a-Victim-Assistance-Provision-in-a-Treaty-Banning-Killer-Robots-Submission-Draft-26-March-2025.pdf> [accessed: 19th May 2025]

Johnson, J. (2023) 'The AI Commander Problem: Ethical, Political, and Psychological Dilemmas of Human-Machine Interactions in AI-enabled Warfare' *Journal of Military Ethics*, 23(3–4), pp. 246–271. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15027570.2023.2175887> [accessed: 14th April 2025]

Klonowska, K. (2024) Designing for Reasonableness: The Algorithmic Mediation of Reasonableness in Targeting Decisions. Lieber Institute West Point. Available at: <https://lieber.westpoint.edu/designing-reasonableness-algorithmic-mediation-reasonableness-targeting-decisions/> [accessed: 8 April 2025]

Lowenstein, A. (2023) *The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation Around the World*. Victoria: Scribe Publications.

Michel, A.H. (2020) *The Black Box, Unlocked*. UNIDIR. Available at: <https://unidir.org/publication/the-black-box-unlocked/> [accessed 8th April 2025]

Modern War Institute (2025) *Battlefield Drones and the Accelerating Autonomous Arms Race in Ukraine*. Available at: <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/battlefield-drones-and-the-accelerating-autonomous-arms-race-in-ukraine/> [Accessed: 7 April 2025]

Mohan, S. (2023) *Filling the Blanks: Putting Gender into Military A.I.* Available at: <https://www.orfonline.org/research/filling-the-blanks-putting-gender-into-military-a-i> [accessed: 11th March 2025]

Nadibaidze, A., Bode, I., & Zhang, Q. (2024) *AI in Military Decision Support Systems: A Review of Developments and Debates*. Available at: https://findresearcher.sdu.dk/ws/portalfiles/portal/275893410/AI_DSS_report_WEB.pdf [accessed 11th March 2025]

New York Times (2012) *Secret 'Kill List' Proves a Test of Obama's Principles and Will*. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/29/world/obamas-leadership-in-war-on-al-qaeda.html> [accessed: 28th April 2025]

Rosen, B. (2024) *How to Make Military AI Governance More Robust*. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2024/08/how-to-make-military-ai-governance-more-robust/> [accessed: 11th March 2025]

Rosen, B. (2023) *Unhuman Killings: AI and Civilian Harm in Gaza*. Available at: <https://www.justsecurity.org/90676/unhuman-killings-ai-and-civilian-harm-in-gaza/> [accessed: 2nd April 2025]

Scharre, P. (2016) *'Centaur Warfighting: The False Choice of Humans vs. Automation'* *Temple International and Comparative Law Journal*, 30(1), pp. 151–154. Available at: https://sites.temple.edu/ticlj/files/2017/02/30.1.Scharre-TICLJ.pdf?utm_source [accessed: 18th June 2025]

Schwarz, E. (2018) *'Technology and Moral Vacuums in Just War Theorising'* *Journal of International Political Theory* 14 (3) pp. 280–298. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1755088217750689> [accessed: 15th April 2025]

SIPRI (2025) *Artificial Intelligence, Non-Proliferation, and Disarmament*. Available at: https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2025-01/eunpdc_no_92_0.pdf [accessed: 19th March 2025]

Sjoberg, L. (2008) *'Why Just War Needs Feminism Now More Than Ever'* *International Politics*, 45 pp. 1-18. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/palgrave.ip.8800216> [accessed: 16th April 2025]

The Guardian (2025) *Middle East Crisis Live*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2025/may/05/israel-gaza-yemen-middle-east-crisis-live-updates> [accessed: 5th May 2025]

The Guardian (2024) 'The Gospel': how Israel uses AI to select bombing targets in Gaza. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/01/the-gospel-how-israel-uses-ai-to-select-bombing-targets> [accessed: 3rd April 2025]

The Kyiv Independent (2024) „Battle-Tested in Ukraine“: How US Drone Makers Turned Ukraine Into a Tagline to Sell West. Available at: <https://kyivindependent.com/battle-tested-in-ukraine-how-us-drone-makers-turned-ukraine-into-a-tagline-to-sell-west/> [Accessed: 7 April 2025]

The Lancet (2024) Concerns Regarding Gaza Mortality Estimates. 403(10328), pp. 1234–1235. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(24\)01683-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(24)01683-0) [accessed: 5th May 2025]

T.M.C. Asser Instituut. (2025) Experts Urge Immediate Safeguards on Military Use of AI Decision-Support Systems. Available at: <https://www.asser.nl/about-the-asser-institute/news/experts-urge-immediate-safeguards-on-military-use-of-ai-decision-support-systems/> [accessed: 29th April 2025]

UNIDIR (2025) AI in the Military Domain: A Briefing Note for States. Available at: https://unidir.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/UNIDIR_AI_in_the_Military_Domain_A_briefing_note_for_States.pdf [accessed: 29th April 2025]

UNIDIR (2023) Artificial Intelligence Beyond Weapons: Application and Impact of AI in the Military Domain. Available at: https://unidir.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/UNIDIR_AI_Beyond_Weapons_Application_Impact_AI_in_the_Military_Domain.pdf [accessed: 11th March 2025]

UNIDIR (2021) Does Military AI Have Gender? Understanding Bias and Promoting Ethical Approaches in Military Applications of AI. Available at: https://unidir.org/files/2021-12/UNIDIR_Does_Military_AI_Have_Gender.pdf [accessed: 16th April 2025]

United Nations. (2024) Governing AI for Humanity: Final Report. High-Level Advisory Body on Artificial Intelligence. Available at: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/governing_ai_for_humanity_final_report_en.pdf [accessed: 12th May 2025]

UK Ministry of Defence (2022) Defence Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2022. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62a7543ee90e070396c9f7d2/Defence_Artificial_Intelligence_Strategy.pdf [accessed: 7th April 2025]

U.S. Department of Defense (2020) AI Strategy.

U.S. Department of State (2023) Political Declaration on Responsible Military Use of Artificial Intelligence and Autonomy. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/political-declaration-on-responsible-military-use-of-artificial-intelligence-and-autonomy-2/> [accessed: 19th March 2025]

Utrecht University (2025) Does AI really reduce casualties in war? “That’s highly questionable,” says Lauren Gould. Available at: <https://www.uu.nl/en/news/does-ai-really-reduce-casualties-in-war-thats-highly-questionable-says-lauren-gould> [accessed: 8th April 2025]

Viveros Álvarez, J. S. (2024) 'The Risks and Inefficacies of AI Systems in Military Targeting Support', Humanitarian Law & Policy Blog. ICRC. Available at: <https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2024/09/04/the-risks-and-inefficiencies-of-ai-systems-in-military-targeting-support/> [accessed: 11th March 2025]

Vox (2024) How AI Tells Israel Who to Bomb. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGqYbXL3kZc&ab_channel=Vox [accessed: 7th April 2025]

Wajcman, J. (2010). Feminist Theories of Technology. Cambridge Journal of Economics, 34(1), 143–152. Available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1540390> [Accessed: 22nd April 2025].

Wilson, J. (2025) 'AI, War and (In)Humanity: The Role of Human Emotions in Military Decision-Making', Humanitarian Law & Policy Blog. ICRC. Available at: <https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2025/02/20/ai-war-and-in-humanity-the-role-of-human-emotions-in-military-decision-making/> [accessed: 9 April 2025]

WIRED (2025) OpenAI's Sora Is Plagued by Sexist, Racist, and Ableist Biases Available at: <https://www.wired.com/story/openai-sora-video-generator-bias/> [accessed: 23rd April 2025]

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) (2025) WILPF Submission to the UN Secretary-General's Report on Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain. Available at: <https://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/resources/publications-and-research/publications/17337-wilpf-submission-to-the-un-secretary-general-s-report-on-artificial-intelligence-in-the-military-domain> [accessed: 23rd April 2025]

Zhou, W. & Griepel, A. R. (2024) Artificial Intelligence in Military Decision-Making: Supporting Humans, Not Replacing Them. ICRC. Available at: <https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2024/08/29/artificial-intelligence-in-military-decision-making-supporting-humans-not-replacing-them/> [accessed: 11th March 2025]

